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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the outcomes of a work forum of representatives of 10 national organizations concerned with the serious shortage of qualified special education and related services professionals. The forum convened to consider the need for a national personnel agenda. The first section of the resulting report describes the shortage of special education personnel and presents tables projecting the need for special educators and related services personnel in the year 2005. This section also discusses the need for quality in the teacher ranks and for the certification of current special educators. The need for national standards for awarding credentials and for a more diverse teaching population are also highlighted. Signs of progress towards meeting the shortage are identified and an agenda is presented. The second section of the report details strategies for implementing the four areas of the agenda. Strategies are presented for recruitment and retention, professional preparation and continuing professional development, assuring standards for professional preparation and certification, and strengthening the link between knowledge and practice. The report concludes with a statement of the common hope of the organizations that the agenda will be used to address the personnel shortage. (CR)

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WHO WILL TEACH?
WHO WILL SERVE?

A REPORT TO THE FIELD BY THE WORK FORUM ON A NATIONAL PERSONNEL AGENDA FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES

THE NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE ON PROFESSIONS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION
1992

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WORK FORUM ON A NATIONAL PERSONNEL AGENDA
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THE NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE ON
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1992

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PREFACE

A serious shortage of qualified special education and related services professionals currently exists. These shortages have reached crisis proportions. The nature and magnitude of these shortages foreshadow far-reaching consequences for individuals with disabilities, for the communities in which they live, and for employers who need their talents.

Addressing this crisis will require the collective action of society as a whole. Collaboration will be needed in both the public and private sectors at the national, regional, state and local levels. This effort must involve the vast array of individuals concerned about the education of children and youth with disabilities and the organizations that represent such individuals.

In February 1992, the Office of Special Education Programs convened a Work Forum of representatives of ten national associations, supported by staff from two federally funded projects, to consider the need for a national personnel agenda. The Work Forum determined that a national personnel agenda is needed to:

- reflect a common mission, and serve as a focus or a framework to unify collective efforts;
- promote needed system change;
- provide a vehicle to implement current knowledge, practice and trends;
- assist in prioritizing the implementation of critical needs;
- drive specific national, regional, state and local initiatives within and among governmental agencies, colleges and universities, as well as professional, parent and advocacy organizations;
- provide the parameters for Federal, state and local policy development, priority setting, and program and policy implementation;
- prompt legislative and congressional action; as well as prompt community development through public and private partnerships;
- facilitate collaboration across and among various public and private agencies, groups and organizations at all levels; and
- enhance our profession and advance the body of knowledge and practice.

For nearly a year members of the Work Forum have worked together and with their respective organizations to develop a national personnel agenda that addresses the common concerns of the collective bodies. This document represents the results of those efforts.

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WHO WILL TEACH? WHO WILL SERVE?

THE VIEW AT THE HORIZON

The pool of qualified, diverse, and adaptable personnel serving children and youth with disabilities is not growing fast enough to meet the needs of those who are entitled to special education and related services.[1] Steps must be taken now to replenish, expand, and improve these critically needed personnel resources. If they are not taken, the hard-won right to an appropriate education for every child with a disability can only grow more fragile. Thus weakened, it can only erode. We must remember: A guaranteed right to services without access is a failed promise; a mandated service without the right talent to deliver it is an empty pledge.

The personnel crisis on the horizon may seem far off, and it may seem that we still have more than enough time to address it. Not so. The danger is more immediate and subtle: The seeming distance of the problem could distort our perception of its magnitude and current needs will always seem more pressing. But distorted perception, especially when compounded by day-to-day distractions, is a recipe for tragedy for the children who so desperately need a quality education.

The Issue of Numbers

The initial alarm about the need to construct a national personnel agenda for special education sounded in 1989, when *A Free Appropriate Education: But Who Will Provide It?* stated that:

> *"This nation has a serious shortage of qualified special education and related services professionals. Projections of both student and professional demographic data indicate that over the coming years the shortage will reach crisis proportion and seriously impede the ability to provide students with handicaps the special education and related services they are guaranteed under federal law." (CEC, 1989).*

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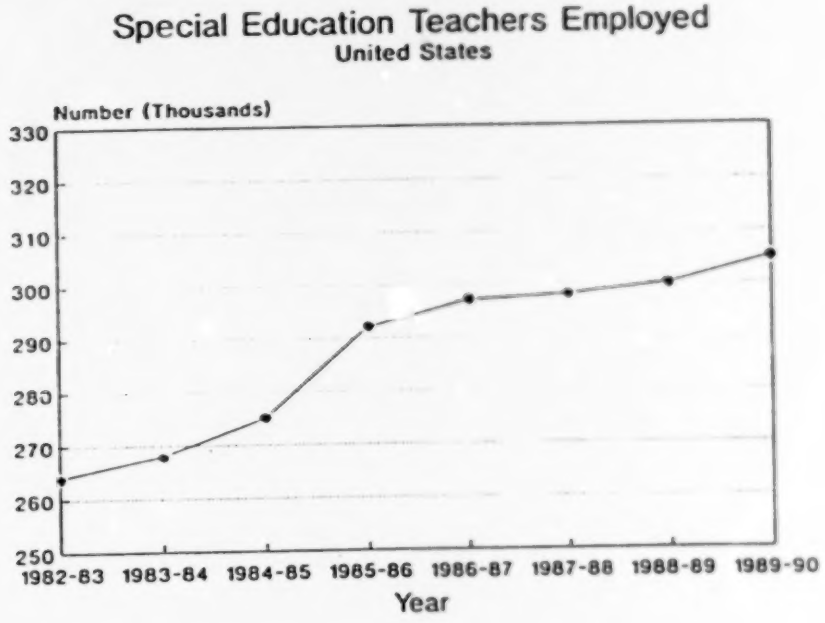
[1] This document uses a number of specialized terms, which will be defined as they appear in the text. Within this first paragraph, the term "children with disabilities" refers to infants, toddlers, children, and youth who have disabilities; this term also is meant to include the "families" of these individuals, which here means the fundamental social and cultural group that provides the basic support and care for a child. This larger group may comprise parents (whether natural, adoptive, foster, surrogate, or single) and other extended family members. "Personnel" refers to all those involved in delivering special education and related services to children and youth with disabilities, across the spectrums of age and learning including but not limited to: teachers, administrators, therapists, speech-language pathologists, social workers, psychologists, and parents. In this document, the term "special education" refers to specially designed instruction to meet the unique educational needs of children and youth with disabilities. "Special education" also includes "early intervention" services provided to infants and toddlers with disabilities, or who are at risk of developing a disability, and their families. "Related services" refers to those supplementary services, e.g., audiology, transportation, or counseling, required to assure that children with disabilities benefit fully from special education services. "Diverse" and "diversity" refer to individuals with disabilities, or those involved in all aspects of their educational programs, who have varied cultural, ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds.

Federal data support the contention. Although the 304,626 special education teachers working in the field in 1989-90 represented a nearly 60 percent increase over those employed when P.L. 94-142 was enacted in 1975, the need--especially for *qualified* teachers who reflect the *diversity* of the special education population--is growing faster than the supply.

The sheer number of children and youth needing special education and related services is increasing. Between 1976 and 1990, the population receiving special education ballooned from 3.7 million to more than 4.8 million--a 30 percent jump.

It is not just that absolute numbers are growing; the *rate of growth* has increased fivefold. The .5 percent growth between the 1983-84 and 1984-85 school years escallated to 2.8 percent between the 1989-90 and 1990-91 school years.

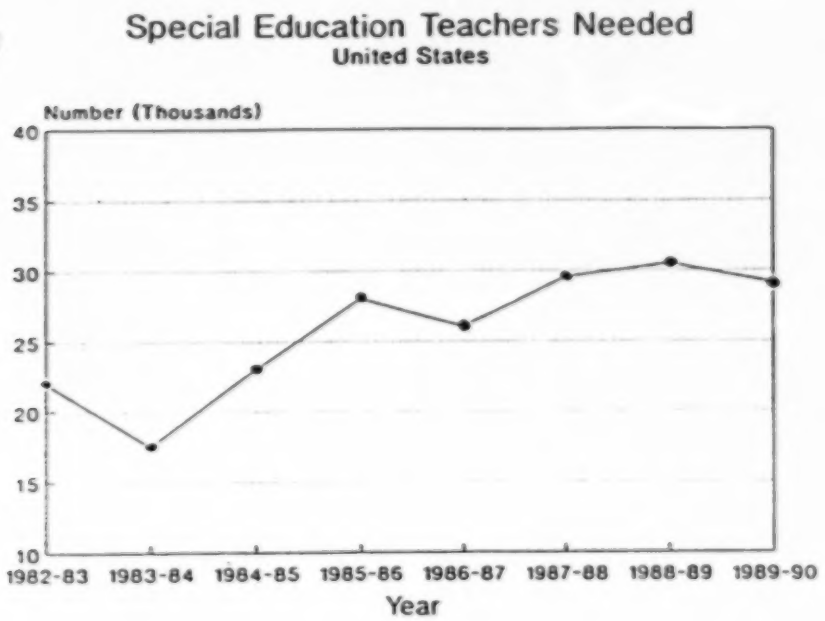
Figure 1.



An important reason for these increases is the fact that special education is serving a broader range of children with special medical needs, infants and toddlers from birth to age 2, and young adults making the transition from school to the work force and adult living. The increasingly unique needs of these groups, as well as those of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, have begun to exert strong pressure on both the human and fiscal resources of the profession.

Constructing an accurate picture of how many professionals are available to serve the broad needs of these varied groups takes some care, however. In 1989-90, the most recent year for which data is available, the states reported to Congress that they needed 29,121 more special education teachers than they could find (See Figure 2). That statistic is alarming on its own terms.[1]

Figure 2.



In contrast, a long-term look at the ratio of teachers needed to teachers employed shows that in 1980, 1 additional teacher was needed for every 6 already employed, whereas in 1989-90, 1 more teacher was needed for every 10.5 employed.[2] That's a sign of progress, but merely lowering the gap between need and supply remains a thin pillow of comfort for children with disabilities. Too many are inappropriately placed, underserved, or badly served, and they deserve better.

To compound this problem, attrition from special education and related services professions further reduces the number of professionals available to teach and serve. Recent

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[1] Needs among states vary. During the 1990-91 school year, for example, Connecticut reported that it needed only 1 additional special education teacher for every 215 in its workforce, while North Dakota and Pennsylvania needed 1 for every 10 teachers employed. Louisiana, Florida, and Indiana, however, need another special education teacher for every 5 they currently employ.

[2] Statistical data in this paragraph were collected by the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education (*Fourteenth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals With Disabilities Act, 1992*), as reported annually by each state; some data have been aggregated to show national trends. The accuracy of the data varies from state to state.

national studies of attrition show that, compared to a 5.3 percent rate for teachers in general education, 7.3 percent of all special education teachers quit their jobs every year, either to leave teaching altogether or to switch into other teaching fields (Boe, 1991). Their reasons vary. Stress and burnout are the factors most often cited anecdotally. Other reasons given include lack of administrative support, adverse working conditions, insufficient pay, isolation and lack of collegiality, problem students, few work rewards, and excessive paperwork burdens (Billingsley, 1992).

A related difficulty lies in the fact that the employment conditions of many special educators inhibit a normal cycle of professional renewal, especially when inflexible work rules prohibit teachers from "taking a break" to teach in general education, then returning to special education.

When we look at projected needs for the numbers of teachers and related professionals, the cause for concern intensifies. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the "moderate" scenario for the number of special educators that will be needed by 2005 shows an increase of 40 percent. Similar projections are reported for professions providing related services. The need for physical therapists is projected to increase by 32 percent; psychologists by 47 percent; and counselors by 42 percent. (See Figure 3).

Figure 3.

THE NEED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES PROFESSIONALS: SOME PROJECTIONS

Employment by Occupation, 1990 and Projection 2005 Alternatives

OCCUPATION	1990 DATA		2005 PROJECTIONS		
	Number[1]	Number[2]	Number		
			Low	Moderate	High
Special Educators	333,227	100.00	428,184	466,660	502,723
Occupational Therapists	4,846	14.14	5,930	6,462	6,962
Physical Therapists	3,000	4.15	3,626	3,951	4,257
Speech/Language Pathologists and Audiologists	34,838	57.80	38,367	42,109	45,364
Social Workers	23,437	5.48	25,864	28,188	30,669
Psychologists	27,003	36.64	36,342	39,608	42,669
Counselors	94,499	70.28	123,112	134,175	144,544

[1] This table represents Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Employment Projections data for only wage and salary employment; figures for self-employed or unpaid family workers are not included.
[2] Percent of practicing professionals employed in educational settings.

The Need for Quality

A more significant factor than how many special education teachers are needed or their rates of attrition from the ranks of teaching is the issue of quality. Although no definitive research has been done, the Office of Special Education in the U.S. Department of Education has estimated that as many as 30 percent of all special educators may be currently teaching under emergency certification, many of them with little or no training or experience in special education (Schrag, 1990). Indeed, there are more teachers who are less than fully certified in special education than in any other area of teaching (Metzke, 1988). Studies indicate that academically talented special educators leave teaching in higher proportions than their less able counterparts (Frank & Keith, 1984).

Ironically, it is the earlier victories in the battles for access to special education and related services that are now pushing the crisis in quality above the horizon. There has been a predictable progression: As law and regulation have brought more and more youngsters with disabilities into the delivery system, the basic concern of parents and advocates has gradually shifted. Because "getting into the program" is now assured by law, access has changed from a final goal to an intermediate one; the new centers of attention have become *successful* learning and *progress* toward adult living--both quality issues. When too few well-qualified professionals are available to assure measurable and positive outcomes for children, parents and advocates rightly become concerned. The mobility of American society and the universality of special education needs have already combined to generate an environment in which quality, far more than numbers, is redefining the future of special education as a national issue.

Rapid changes in the service delivery system and expansion of the populations served by special education have increased concerns about the quality of the professional work force. Professional quality is continually being redefined to reflect contemporary views of what constitutes quality in professional practice. For example, the current emphasis on inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream education has led to calls for special education professionals who are able to work effectively with general education teachers as well as for teachers who are prepared to teach all students in heterogeneous groups. There is growing consensus that teachers and other professionals who provide the highest quality services will be those who can teach and serve the widest range of students (Tucker, 1992; Meyer, 1992). Similarly there is consensus that high quality practice includes new approaches to working effectively in the community, with other agencies, and with parents and families. Moreover, the rapid expansion of the students we serve to include infants, toddlers and young adults who are increasingly diverse culturally and linguistically adds new elements to the concept of quality of personnel.

Perhaps the most central characteristic of the evolving views of quality is that they are based on rapid changes in philosophy, demography, and service systems. This fact argues for *adaptability* as a pivotal element of quality. Professionals must be prepared to assume and effectively hold ever changing roles. We require new kinds of professionals who are

prepared to adapt to ongoing changes in programs and services and who are committed to developing and refining their skills to meet the changing requirements for quality practice.

A significant challenge to assuring quality in the professional workplace is the lack of a national consensus regarding what constitutes effective practice. Nowhere is the lack of consensus more apparent than when we speak about teacher certification and other kinds of credentialing. Although these procedures are designed to address the issue of quality (i.e., minimum qualifications) in instructional and related services personnel, they often have the opposite effect. In the absence of national standards too many states remain preoccupied by a "turf mentality" about their own standards for professional certification, which produces tremendous state-to-state discrepancies in the official standards that define a "qualified" special educator. We cannot afford to continue with 50 state level debates about criteria for entry into the profession. The result is a dysfunctional impact on the professional status of special educators, their mobility, and the possibilities for constructing a coherent, national system for preparing professionals.

The lack of national standards contributes in a major way to both teacher shortages and the variable quality in special education and related services. The hard truth is that we can no longer afford to view the solutions to supply and quality problems as solely state issues or prerogatives. National standards for awarding credentials, which can guide rigorous professional preparation and continuing education programs, are desperately needed.[1]

Unqualified personnel are being hired and retained in some places, while fully qualified personnel are unable to find positions in others. Both of these tendencies, in turn, defeat the intent of the law by diluting the overall quality of instruction and related services. Quality of education is further diluted as special educators are required to take on responsibilities that cut into instructional time, e.g., the addition of more clerical tasks as support staff are laid off by financially strained school districts.

Special education policy and decision making are influenced not solely by student need but also by the adjustments required to cope with inadequate numbers of *qualified* personnel. Unless reversed, these growing consequences will soon threaten to become not just unfortunate side-effects, but the norm. These conditions will seriously impair the nation's ability to achieve appropriate educational outcomes for children with disabilities, outcomes to which our country has proclaimed its commitment not only in law, but in our understanding of the very meaning of education itself.

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[1] "Professional preparation" refers to the educational programs and experiences that prepare individuals to provide services to children with disabilities, and that lead to some form of certification, licensure, or other eligibility to practice in education, related services, or early intervention fields.

But children and youth with disabilities cannot aspire to the fullness of their futures if increasingly serious questions about quantity and quality remain on the personnel agenda of special education. For a young person with disabilities, the task of learning is hard enough without these extra burdens.

The Need for Diversity

Children and youth with disabilities are at least as diverse in their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic background as the general population. Unfortunately, their diversity is not matched among the professionals who provide learning experiences and support services to children with disabilities and their families. Nor are adults with disabilities well represented among professionals, support personnel, parents, and volunteers in the delivery system, where they could serve as appropriate and powerful role models.

It is painfully evident that the need for more diverse special education personnel is growing more critical. The demographic profile of the general education population is changing rapidly; as is widely reported, by the year 2000 one of every three Americans will be African American, Hispanic, or Asian American. Yet, data from a 1989 survey conducted by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) show that, among more than 27,000 respondents, only 9 percent of those enrolled in special education degree programs were African-American and 1.8 percent were Hispanic (AACTE, 1990). While African American students, for example, make up 28 percent of all enrollments in special education, African Americans make up only 11.2 percent of special educators (U.S. House of Representatives, 1990). Reasons cited for the decrease in the number of teachers among culturally diverse populations included poor salaries, more attractive career options, and poor school environments (Dilworth, 1988). Respect, fairness, and indeed, good professional practice all dictate that the composition of our profession reflect those we serve (Kennedy, 1992).

Signs of Progress

Despite the emerging and future problems posed by the inadequate number, quality, and diversity of personnel in special education and related services, limited signs of progress have emerged in recent years:

- As a baseline, there is widespread, general agreement that the shortage of qualified personnel is severe, and that solving this problem will require a coordinated and collaborative[1] effort on the part of individuals, professional associations, state and

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[1] In this paper, "coordination" means a working relationship between two or more parties characterized by noncompeting goals and separate responsibility for decision making and outcomes, but in which activities and resources may be shared. "Collaboration" means a working relationship between two or more parties in which goals are shared, parity exists among the partners, decisions are made jointly, and both resources and accountability for outcomes are shared.

local education agencies, colleges and universities, the federal government, and the private sector.

- Federal attention and resources have expanded in ways that contribute to achieving better results. State and local governments have also become more active in seeking strategies to resolve problems related to diversity.

- Colleges and universities have expanded the range of their programs to respond to the need for increased quantity, quality, and diversity of personnel.

- Professionals have focused research on the dynamics of the problem and on creative approaches to prepare and retain better qualified personnel.

This is encouraging. Nevertheless, we need to remind ourselves repeatedly that although change is underway, momentum remains weak. Unless that energy is strengthened, results will come too late for too many. No marathon is won in the first ten steps, but neither can it be won without a steady stride and a tenacious focus on the finish line.

The organizations and agencies represented on this Task Force believe that the problems of the quality and quantity of personnel in special education and related services have now achieved pervasive and critical dimensions. Far more sweeping action is not only warranted but demanded. The constrained, often meager resources of all segments of the special education community clearly heighten the need for a focused set of goals and strategies that all can endorse, and that all can work to implement.

An Agenda

In the end, assuring that children with disabilities receive the early intervention, special education, and related services they need to become productive and fulfilled citizens requires that we achieve four interdependent goals. These are not offered as a sequential plan, but as an overall statement of what must be accomplished. Nor do the goals stand in isolation. They interlock; none can be achieved effectively without the others. The goals of this personnel agenda are related to four areas of effort:

1. *Recruitment and Retention*. Our goal is to make sure that the special education and related professions recruit and retain enough people of sufficient quality and diversity to meet the needs of children with disabilities, and of their families.

2. *Professional Preparation*. Our goal is to build a profession in which each succeeding generation of professionals has been rigorously and appropriately prepared, and is committed to the highest quality of special education and other services for children with disabilities and their families.

3. *Professional Development.*[1] Our goal is to foster efforts of continuing professional development that respond to both emerging needs and new knowledge, and to make appropriate professional development opportunities available to all who need them.

4. *Leadership.* Our goal is to mobilize a system of resources and incentives, and the diverse, versatile leaders needed to prepare and support those who are directly involved in educating children with disabilities and their families.

Undergirding each of these goals is the recognition that the surest and straightest path to improved quality in special education, early intervention, and related services is the path that connects knowledge with practice. In that sense, each goal must be translated strategically into something concrete. The connection between the research paper and the theories of the seminar room on the one hand, and the child with a disability on the other, must be direct and unbroken.

To that end, then, we propose this National Personnel Agenda. If students with disabilities are to receive in full what simple humanity demands--and equally to the point, what their fellow citizens have agreed is their right--this Agenda must become the Agenda not just of our field, but of education as a whole, and indeed, of the nation itself.

In the next section, the four goals spelled out above are addressed and supported across a series of "strategic clusters." Within each, we make specific suggestions for actions that can lead to the achievement of one or more of the goals. Readers should note that because of the mutual reinforcement of goals and strategies in this Agenda, a strategic cluster is not tied directly to a single, individual goal. Indeed, many strategies will apply, and can bear fruit, across the full spectrum of goals.

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[1] "Professional development" here means the wide range of rigorous and systematic learning activities that advance knowledge and improve practice. Because some activities and experiences included in this term are aimed primarily at paraprofessionals, parents, and volunteers, rather than at educational and service professionals, we choose to speak of "professional development" rather than "personnel development." When coupled with a strong emphasis on career ladders and professional growth, this choice of language underscores a strong commitment to developing a stable core of professionals.

A NATIONAL PERSONNEL AGENDA: STRATEGIES

This National Personnel Agenda offers a foundation for building both quality and diversity. The severe shortage of qualified professionals in special education, the increasing need for early intervention, and the strong support of related services all require men and women who can meet the highest standards of practice. Carrying out this Agenda demands bold steps to improve the quality and accessibility of degree programs, opportunities for continuing professional development, and systems that can help all personnel who teach and serve children with disabilities to become more able and more effective.

The sets of strategies offered here are presented with the full recognition that a credible and effective response to the pressing needs for more highly qualified professionals will involve all stakeholders. We in the field will have to coordinate and lead a collaborative effort by the public and private sectors; the federal government; regional, state, and local communities; and a host of across-the-board efforts to attract, prepare, develop, and retain qualified professionals in special education and related services. This is not an Agenda for one group; all have a role to play.

Strategies for Personnel Recruitment and Retention

As every business, faculty, and sports team understands, the quality of its products, graduates, and play depend heavily on its "raw material." Those outcomes also depend heavily on how well its people are prepared, treated, and rewarded. We offer the following strategies to improve recruitment and retention efforts in our profession.

A. Expand and maintain a valid, comprehensive body of knowledge on effective recruitment and retention strategies.

Sustaining any comprehensive and useful knowledge base on professional recruitment and retention means describing and explaining the specific factors that affect supply and demand, diversity, and quality. We do not know enough about why individuals enter special education and its related professions, what factors influence their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their work, or why they leave. The knowledge base we need must be useful to policy and decision makers and therefore be broader than the information collected by a particular state or in a specific academic study. Such a knowledge base should also be differentiated according to specific categories of personnel, such as specialization by disability, administrative personnel vs. front-line teachers and other service providers, and personnel from different program types. One of the criteria for identifying the new knowledge needed should be its usefulness in guiding policy and decision making.

B. Create outreach and information services that will encourage persons with ability and commitment to explore and prepare for careers in special education, related services, and early intervention. In particular, these information services should give attention to culturally and linguistically diverse persons, and individuals with disabilities.

The profession urgently needs aggressive, broad-based recruitment efforts to encourage more individuals of high ability and potential to consider careers in special education and related professions. Since too few individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds are now preparing for these careers, coordinated and targeted outreach efforts are necessary. The program conducted by the National Clearinghouse on Professions in Special Education is the only federally funded effort that has begun to address this need in a nationally coordinated fashion. Its efforts in gathering and disseminating information about career options, preparation requirements, and financial aid are essential to the health of the profession. Given the length of time needed to prepare for many careers in our field, activities like those of the Clearinghouse program should be expanded and coordinated nationally.

C. Identify and implement incentives for qualified persons to enter and persist in careers in special education, related services, and early intervention.

Current personnel shortages, particularly of qualified personnel, stem from at least three factors: (a) not enough new talent is being attracted into preparation programs, (b) many students who have completed preparation programs are not embarking on the profession for which they have prepared, and (c) too many special education teachers are leaving the profession (attrition). Major strategies here must be developing more attractive career incentives, e.g., college loan forgiveness, supplemental income options, and more career ladders that provide attractive incentives; increasing base pay; and enhancing public support and respect for the profession.

Such opportunities can motivate not only those in secondary and post-secondary schools but also those weighing job possibilities after graduation. At the same time, deeper and more focused research is needed on why individuals choose to stay in the profession. Such research can help identify the most appropriate recruitment target and guide efforts to reinforce the factors that contribute to professional and career satisfactions. Complementary research is needed to identify disincentives, with a view toward ameliorating them and eliminating them altogether wherever possible.

D. Identify and implement strategies to recruit and retain qualified personnel in a wide range of difficult-to-fill positions.

Supply and demand factors for personnel vary greatly across different geographic, economic, demographic, and sociological environments. These variations are especially pronounced for certain age or disability groups. Specific strategies, such as pay and benefits

differentials or targeted professional support services, can encourage personnel to enter difficult-to-fill positions and create a balanced educational and service environment nationally.

Strategies for Professional Preparation and Continuing Professional Development

A continuous system of professional preparation and development requires procedures to help talented and qualified personnel get ready for and remain in careers in special education and related services. We offer the following strategies for strengthening professional preparation.

*A. **Expand and maintain a comprehensive knowledge base that describes the personnel needs of the profession, guides the task of preparing the next generation of leaders and direct service providers, and shapes continuing professional development.***

We need better and more reliable information about current and projected personnel needs for leadership and direct service personnel. We also need information on aspects of professional preparation that are most helpful to novices in responding to the demands for high-quality practice in every aspect of the life of our profession. In particular, the field needs a strong knowledge base regarding the personal and organizational characteristics that foster career persistence, life-long learning, and attitudes of professionalism. Such knowledge should also include adequate descriptions of the populations from which it was derived.

*B. **Increase the capabilities of professional preparation programs and systems to prepare personnel and provide for continuing professional development beyond initial preparation.***

The current needs for professional preparation and the professional development that follows and supports it are now more extensive and varied than existing systems and programs can meet. As interest in pursuing careers in special education and related services grows, the field will require a stable system for preparing professionals and promoting their continued development, well supported by research and academic leadership.

We need to remember especially that increased diversity means that people will be coming to special education and related careers via a number of paths. They will include paraprofessionals, professionals from other fields, professionals with little or no special education experience, and teachers changing their focus in mid-career. Their preparation and continuing education will demand much in the way of resources, flexibility, and responsiveness. The systems through which they are prepared and sustained should therefore include a range of options, including observation, mentoring relationships, self-study, study

groups, sabbaticals, formal college and graduate-level courses, distance learning options, and participation in professional associations.

C. Assure that the content of programs of professional preparation and continuing professional development is responsive to both the emerging knowledge base of the field and its anticipated needs, especially the needs of changing and diverse populations.

The content of programs of professional preparation and continuing professional development programs must reflect accurate, current knowledge and skills. The professionals who design and deliver such programs likewise need the opportunities and resources to stay current, to incorporate new knowledge into their teaching, and to maintain a ready access to new practice as it develops in the field. Currency of information is especially important regarding the needs of changing and diverse populations, especially as the field's knowledge base grows and new information is continuously reinterpreted.

D. Design and deliver innovative, rigorous professional preparation and continuing professional development programs.

Flexibility is essential if we are to modify existing curriculum, develop new curriculum, and create innovative methods for preparing and enriching professionals. Flexibility is particularly urgent to meet the varied needs of experienced paraprofessionals, professionals with little recent professional education, and those involved in mid-career changes. But the profession is ill-served if improvements in the capabilities of the professional preparation system are purchased by lowering the overall quality of its products. Flexibility without rigor can lead to a lack of professionalism and eventually to haphazard practice. We need balance.

E. Provide incentives for continuing professional development and effective practice.

Encouraging personnel to continue their education throughout their careers goes hand in hand with providing the opportunities for doing so. The field needs substantial incentives that create the conditions for pursuing continuing professional development, such as released time, a wider range of and more accessibility to learning resources, and the professional recognition and rewards that go with increased abilities, knowledge, and competence.

F. Prepare all schoo! personnel to provide appropriate services to students with disabilities.

All school personnel share the responsibility to provide appropriate services and support to children with disabilities, not only in specialized classes and activities, but in general education settings as well. Preparation and continuing professional development for *all* personnel must therefore include knowledge and skills related to *all* students with

disabilities in their various settings. Special education and related services personnel bear a particular responsibility to learn about the demands and expectations of non-special educational settings where their students spend time. General education personnel must learn how to meet educational needs of students with disabilities who can be appropriately served in general education. Better articulation between general and special education preparation curricula should be sought, and dual certification options examined.

G. Develop consortia to plan and offer programs of professional preparation and continuing professional development.

Because of the complexity of their needs, some populations and geographic areas require highly specific approaches to professional development. In some regions, for example, distance and the sparseness of population are significant factors in designing professional preparation and continuing education programs. Similarly, for some low-incidence disabilities or service specializations, absolute demand may not be dramatic. Thus, high-quality programs will sometimes require consortia to promote quality professional preparation and the effective use of resources.

Strategies to Assure Standards for Professional Preparation and Certification

Rigorous but flexible national standards for awarding credentials for new personnel, and for accrediting programs that prepare those individuals for employment, are essential. We offer the following strategies for using professionally recognized standards to increase the availability and quality of professionals to teach and serve children with disabilities, and their families.

A. Adopt rigorous national standards for awarding professional credentials.

Rigorous national standards will assure that all professionals in special education, related services, and early intervention have the knowledge and skills to provide competent, high-quality services to all children with disabilities, including students from diverse populations. National standards for professional certification should accommodate regional needs, facilitate reciprocity across states, and promote the flexibility to provide services in areas where the needs are highest. Where available, existing professionally recognized standards should be used; where they are not, they must be developed.

B. Develop credential levels that promote career ladders and professional growth.

The credentials of our profession should reflect the different levels of knowledge and skill that go with varying types of service or instruction. Career ladders and opportunities for promotion should also recognize different levels of preparation and performance and

permit personnel to work in appropriate service roles for which they are qualified while pursuing higher levels of certification.

C. Adopt national accreditation standards for programs of personnel preparation that encourage flexibility in design.

In every profession, rigorous accreditation standards help to assure that preparation programs are of high quality; we can expect no less of our own. The standards we espouse should require that preparation programs be geared to the needs of personnel from diverse populations, including retraining for those from other professions and those without ready access to campus sites. Accreditation standards should also require that institutions be responsive to such changing conditions as new technologies, changing demographics, and emerging practices. Where available, professionally recognized accreditation standards should be used; where they are not, they must be developed.

Strategies for Strengthening the Link between Knowledge and Practice

A continuing program of professional development means a growing, adaptive ability both to respond to emerging needs and to generate new knowledge. Such a program will focus on finding innovative ways of disseminating research, sharing successful practices, and fostering new lines of research. We offer the following strategies for strengthening the link between knowledge and practice.

A. Generate new knowledge that contributes to advances in practice and appropriately serves the distinct needs of diverse populations.

Effective practices in special education and related services must be built on a firm and expanding knowledge base; as the field expands, the need for more knowledge will naturally increase. If the services we provide are to improve in quality while they also expand to serve a growing constituency, we must embrace the professional responsibility to generate new knowledge, validate it continually through systematic, high-quality research, and rigorously evaluate new and existing practice.

B. Translate new knowledge into effective applications and apply new knowledge and technologies in advancing professional practice.

To be truly effective for children, the growing knowledge base of the field must be accompanied by mechanisms that translate research results into daily practice, and in a timely way. Such mechanisms include (but are not limited to) new research and development strategies, demonstration projects, expanded opportunities for publication, and more widespread use of such dissemination efforts as on-line data bases. Current and practical information about newly developed and validated applications must be readily available if others are to adapt them to their own instructional needs. And as empirically based advances

in practice evolve, we must make sure they find their way quickly into professional preparation and development programs.

C. Ensure that advances in practice are responsive to existing and newly identified populations, and that they incorporate innovative service delivery models.

As the age ranges, types of disabilities, and service needs of children and youth entitled to special education and related services continue to expand, it is imperative that practice keep pace. The very heart of our professional mandate is contained in the word "appropriate," which must continue to serve as the standard for all practice, whether a new teaching technique, a new diagnostic tool, or a more effective strategy for delivering services to culturally diverse populations. Our continuing task is to assure that the child's need defines the concrete form of "appropriate" in all contexts.

D. Ensure that educators and related professionals have the knowledge and skills necessary for effective coordination and collaboration at the classroom level.

Both professional preparation programs and post-degree programs for professional development should include a specific focus on how to develop and carry out collaborative service efforts. Such programs should also take special care to teach techniques for sharing resources and to develop a commitment to professional collaboration. Such measures can help ensure that children and youth with disabilities receive comprehensive and integrated programs and services.

A STATEMENT OF OUR HOPES

This National Personnel Agenda is not the initiative of any single group. It is a statement of what we believe the special education community needs to accomplish, together with some suggestions for how to get the job done. It is offered in the full recognition that true reform, i.e., reform that responds fully to the pressing need for additional and better qualified professional personnel, must have a highly developed sense of priorities, and that it must involve all stakeholders. An "Us vs. Them" attitude is not only wholly inappropriate, it is counter-productive. The truth is, there is no "Them"; if you are reading this report, you are part of "Us." The federal government, indeed, has a role, but it is no more significant than that of others. All must collaborate to accomplish the Agenda we have set forth: Public and private sectors; state and local levels of education; related service providers; professional associations; institutions of higher education: parents, teachers, and students. *Everyone*.

Our success will be directly proportional to our ability to bring task and stakeholder together. In that regard, even a cursory reading of this document will reveal at least one place where each stakeholder can lead, assist, or follow. There is no want of work to be done. All any of us needs to do when some new or unfinished task presents itself is simply to begin.

But in the final analysis, an agenda is no mere plan. Nor is it simply an expression of intent. At the deepest level, an agenda is a statement of hope, a confident statement that "What now is" is only the incomplete form of "What can be." These, then, are our hopes. our list of "What Can Be."

We share a common mission, to which we believe all who care about children and youth with disabilities can subscribe. Our Agenda focuses and frames that mission in the form of a vision for each child's future; it likewise points in the direction of a collective effort. **Our hope** is that this Agenda will attract others to our mission.

We see a shared crisis. Much of it can be laid at the door of those both in the professional community and outside it who have failed to understand fully that finding and keeping high-quality personnel cannot be assumed; it requires a systemic effort. We cannot be half-hearted. **Our hope** is that this Agenda will promote needed system change wherever professionals are prepared and in whatever context they practice, not merely as a matter of earnest concern but as a matter of the highest priority.

In the end, we must "grow" our profession, and to do so, we must all learn. **Our hope** is that this Agenda will inspire a renewed focus on growth among professional personnel, a growth rooted in current knowledge, cutting-edge practice, and a deepened commitment to infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities and to their families.

The colleges and universities that prepare professionals and advance the knowledge in all our fields have a responsibility, with us, to raise the quality of our profession. **Our hope** is that this Agenda will encourage more rigorous standards across the board.

We understand that policy is hope made visible. **Our hope**, therefore, is that the Agenda we propose will prompt corrective action in state legislatures and in the Congress, and that it will encourage community development through public and private partnerships. Advancing this Agenda will require the cooperation and collaboration of all stakeholders--state and local education agencies, institutions of higher education, service agencies and providers, professional associations, paraprofessionals, parents, and volunteers.

Yet, our intentions by themselves are like the resolve to help that is unaccompanied by willing hands. **Our hope** is that this Agenda will first define a framework for creating resolution among federal, state, and local bodies to develop policies and set priorities, but above all, that it will speed high-quality, effective educational programs and services to all children with disabilities and their families.

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